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# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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## ENLARGING THE AMERICAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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A short preface will serve to indicate the origin and purpose of this article. Its authors have from time to time found themselves in disagreement with regard to the junior high school. Deliberate consideration of the points of disagreement convinced them that there are certain fundamental educational principles involved in the organization of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades to which they can both unreservedly subscribe. They have thought it desirable that a joint statement of such fundamentals be drawn up. The following article is the result. They are prepared to share alike responsibility for every statement in this article.

There can be no doubt in the mind of any careful student of education that there are important changes going forward in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. These changes are related in many ways to the fact that much greater numbers of pupils than ever before in our school history are passing through these grades. The time was, before the studies in retardation, when the number of pupils who reached the eighth grade was comparatively small, and the entering class in the high school contained so small a percentage of the pupils who entered the eighth grade that the matter

of the transition was a much less urgent matter than it is today. Now school officers are making every effort to carry pupils forward as far and as fast as possible, and the course of study and the organization of the grades are being worked over with a view to keeping pupils in school. The efforts of teachers and principals are being reinforced by social agencies outside the schools. The improvement in the economic condition of the people in this country has increased the ambition of families that their children should go to school beyond the elementary grades and has made it possible for children to prolong the period of their schooling.

It is needless to review in this connection the enlargements of the high school which recent years have witnessed. The facts are well known and too impressive to be forgotten. From the high school downward as well as from the elementary school upward there has been a reaching across the gulf which in former days was set between the eighth grade and the ninth grade. And it is well for American education that this should be so.

The improvement in relations between the eighth and ninth grades has served to emphasize the importance of the fact that our school system is in theory and is coming to be in practice a continuous opportunity for every pupil. Any movement which makes for ease of transition from one grade to another should be applauded. Any agency which sets up a barrier to divide one grade from another is to be condemned without reserve.

The first principle, then, which we reach in our consideration is the principle that all organization within the schools should be judged as appropriate to the American system of education just in the degree in which it makes for continuous and uninterrupted opportunity for every pupil.

The second general principle is closely related to the first. Within each school unit there has been and is appearing in still larger measure an enrichment of the course of study and of the opportunity offered to the pupil. This tendency shows itself in many different ways. The school year in American schools has been lengthened. The teachers are better trained each succeeding year. There is a better and broader collection of textbook material; school buildings are better; maps and apparatus for demonstration

are better and more common. This internal development of all aspects of school operation is in keeping with the increasing regard for an education which appears in the business world, in public life, and in the ambitions of individual pupils.

That this enlargement of the educational program should affect especially the upper grades of the elementary school and the first year of the high school is by no means surprising. It is just at this point in the school that the pupil, made acquainted with the fundamental tools of experience in the lower grades, finds himself entering productively into the enjoyment of his achievements. Because he has learned to read fluently the child in the seventh grade has before him the rich world of history and geography and elementary science. He can grasp with more assurance the principles of mathematics and can use with greater nicety the words and forms of the vernacular. The period of varied and enlarged education has come and the course of study must be enriched.

No less is it true that the first year of the high school must undergo an enlargement. Formerly it was the narrow portal to an exclusive course open to the few. Today the ninth grade is part of a broad cosmopolitan scheme of education. There is no disposition as in days gone by to limit the student's opportunity to a few required subjects.

Enrichments of the course of study are by no means confined to the grades here under discussion, but the lower grades of the elementary school from the nature of the case must always concern themselves chiefly with a comparatively narrow range of rudimentary subjects. The upper grades become broader because they permit the pupil to pass out of the rudimentary stages of his education. Nor should the fact be overlooked in this connection that the enrichment of a course of study often consists in that internal reorganization which frees instruction from unproductive by-paths. History can be enriched by taking out worthless formal material. Arithmetic and geography must be purged of the waste which is now all too common. This internal readjustment is quite as important as importation into the course of new material.

Especially is it true that the work of each grade should be modified so as to eliminate useless repetitions. Reviews are important

and should not be neglected, but the upper grades of the elementary school have sometimes been the scenes of unjustifiable waste of the time and energy of the pupils because the conscientious teacher has dragged the bored and sated children through review after review. Just because the eighth grade has been looked on as a kind of terminus, these reviews have doubtless tended to accumulate here. If we learn to think of the educational program as continuous, the reviews may be more equitably and economically distributed.

Of large importance in this connection is the character of the work in the so-called intermediate grades, especially the fourth, fifth, and sixth. Upon the efficiency of the work done here will depend in large measure the success of any attempt to reorganize the upper grades. Hand in hand with the development of a new point of view for the seventh and eighth grades should go a concerted and intelligent effort (1) to insure better teaching and a more mature and permanent body of teachers for the middle grades, and (2) to formulate principles that shall serve to govern the instruction and training of children between eight and twelve, at least as satisfactorily as analogous principles are now governing the work of the primary grades and the work that has to do with the adolescent period.

The enriched program must have one characteristic above all others. It must be appropriate to a democracy. Here we come to a point in the discussion where it is easy to fall into disagreements. The world is still experimenting with democracy. We are striving to develop a democracy in our other social institutions, as, for example, in our industries. How difficult it is to reach a generally acceptable definition of democracy appears if we study industries and industrial legislation and note the many shades of divergent opinion and conflicting practices.

Out of the uncertainties which surround this part of our discussion we may expect fairly universal assent to three general statements. First, the future must see greater emphasis than has the past on studies of community life and community needs. And the term "community" must not be narrowly defined. The course of study must be enriched to include intensive study of our nation and its meaning to our citizenship and to the world. Secondly, the

future must see the enriched course providing a broad, sure foundation for the practical life of the individual. Again, there must be no narrow limitation of the individual, no training for a single type of life. This is not a plea for narrow trade training; it is rather an assertion that there must be a vigorous effort toward the development of a comprehensive view of industry, so that the individual may choose his career after a broad view of democratic opportunity. Thirdly, the enrichment of the course must aim consciously at the destruction of those provincialisms and class prejudices which have worked in the history of nations in the past, counter to the interests of democracy. Ignorance of other tasks than one's own breeds lack of sympathy and results in the separation of group from group. Intelligence regarding others brings with it sympathy and co-operation.

Each of the three points outlined in the last paragraph invites one to compose a chapter on educational possibilities. This is not the appropriate place for a full discussion of these matters. In order to avoid ambiguity two negative statements must be made.

First, a course of study is not broad or enriched in the sense in which the term "enrichment" is used in this article if it is a limited course preparing for a trade. Nor is the fact lost to view that there is a legitimate demand in the experiences of many boys and girls for a trade training. It is, however, contended, with unlimited emphasis on the needs of a democracy, that whenever trade training is given it should be accompanied just as far as possible by broadening, sympathy-cultivating instruction. To give early a limited occupational training will tend (1) to set up class distinctions, and (2) to deprive large numbers of children of the broad basis of general and liberal training, which is essential to successful democracy. Every effort to reorganize the work of the upper grades should start from the fundamental principle that effective democracy implies the highest possible level of trained and informed intelligence in all of the members of the democratic group.

Secondly, there are certain forms of enlargement of the course of study which defeat rather than promote the ends of education. Thus if more subjects are introduced into the course than can be

assimilated by the pupils there will follow a distraction which will be quite as disastrous as any limitation that could be put on the course. Pupils will fail to learn the lesson of concentration of attention; thoroughness and mastery will have no meaning for them; they will carry away a confused general idea of the materials they study, and they will fall into a type of superficial thinking which is one of the perils of the modern course of study.

Not only so, but there is danger in the enlargement of the course of study that subjects will be introduced which are in form far beyond the maturity of the pupils. The old-fashioned course of study undoubtedly made the mistake of assuming too little capacity on the part of pupils. The new and more ambitious programs are sometimes reckless in the introduction of advanced courses. If, for example, algebra and geometry are to be brought down into the elementary grades they must be modified in their content and in their mode of presentation as compared with the same subjects when taught in the high school. There is no surer way to fail in the seventh and eighth grades than to carry back without change a high-school course in algebra and attempt to administer it in a formal way to immature pupils. These examples should serve as warnings against an irrational and ill-considered enlargement of the course of study.

We may turn now to another general principle of education which has been subject to a variety of interpretations in the course of the reorganization of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. It is the principle of individual differences. If there is one lesson which has been clearly taught by all of the recent investigations in education, it is the lesson that there are wide differences among pupils with respect to tastes, abilities, and capacities for progress, and that these must be heeded in the preparation of the school program. We are confronted here by a difficult problem. It is the business of a democratic school to see to it that the materials of thought which are presented to children shall contain enough common elements so that the thinking of the community as a whole shall be guided along similar lines. A school which gives to one class of children one set of ideas and ideals and to another class an entirely different set of ideas and ideals will make for social dis-

tinctions that are dangerous in a democracy. On the other hand, a course of study which knows no variations and makes no adaptations of its content to individuals of different capacities and different interests is quite as dangerous in a democracy as the stratifying course. Individual differences appear in the economic life of a democracy and play an important rôle in providing the community with workers of different types. There is the mature man who is interested in engineering problems. On the other hand there is the man of literary type wholly unadapted to the practical problems of engineering but capable of making a contribution to the welfare of the community by his attention to letters. In the same way in the trades there is the man who has mechanical interests. On the other hand there is the carpenter who is more interested in the use of hand tools and in the problems of construction.

Differentiation of occupations is an important outgrowth of our present economic system, and no definition of democracy can overlook the principle of division of occupations and diversity of interests. Our schools no less than our factories must recognize the fact that the child as he matures differs increasingly from his neighbor. How soon the school should recognize this fact and begin to offer diversified opportunities to the children has been an unsolved problem in our educational system. Heretofore we have adopted the practice of introducing high-school students suddenly to large opportunities of election. Even this practice is of relatively recent origin, but during the last decade a very wide latitude has been recognized as desirable in high-school curricula. The elementary school, on the other hand, has been very slow in adopting the principle of differentiation and has introduced it in most systems only in the upper grades. If the elementary course is so safeguarded that its content of instruction shall give to all children some common central body of ideas, differentiation must be introduced cautiously and with full regard to the requirement that universal instruction be given in fundamentals. It is not incompatible with this demand that individual differences be recognized to some extent from the very outset of school life, although the general principle of individual differences begins to assert itself as an important basis of educational organization in the middle grades



of the school. There ought to be a differentiation of such a sort that those pupils who can go forward rapidly shall have their capacity for more work recognized and those who mature somewhat more slowly and are able to progress only at a slower rate shall be given the type of instruction which is adapted to their particular capacities. Such a difference in rate of movement will inevitably have an effect upon the amount of material which pupils of different grades of ability can absorb. The faster pupils will cover a wider range of experiences, and it is to be expected that the education which results from this widening of the range of experience will mature into differences of taste and preparation for later work that are of major importance. There is no more urgent problem at the present time in the organization of the elementary-school course than the discrimination between those essential types of instruction which should be given to all children and the additional types of instruction which can properly be offered to children of exceptional capacities.

There can be little doubt that the reading in the sixth grade ought to be affected by this consideration. Children ought to be allowed to read silently passages of their own selection as a part of the regular school work. They ought, indeed, to be encouraged to take up material which will carry them beyond the ordinary routine of classroom exercises. The teacher's supervision of the children's reading thus becomes even in the intermediate grades a matter of differentiating the content of instruction.

What is true in reading is also true in the other subjects. The range and kind of historical material which is included in the seventh and eighth grades will differ according to the capacities of the pupils. This does not mean that one child should pursue a course in ancient history and exclude all of the material that belongs in the course in United States history. It means, rather, that all of the children should have training in the fundamentals of the history of their own country, but some children ought to be given an opportunity, because of their natural tastes and capacities, to go beyond the elementary requirement which is imposed upon all students. What is true of history is true also of cooking and of manual training.

The difficulty which arises in the application of this principle of individual differences is to be faced by frankly recognizing the unsolved problem of our new course of study. In the course of the future there must be a common body of material for all children and a body of carefully supervised but differentiated opportunities for children of different tastes and capacities. Anyone who is disposed to divide the course of study of the seventh grade into entirely separate and distinct curricula for different children does violence to the fundamental demands of a democratic organization. On the other hand, anyone who would hold the course of study at any point to rigid and narrow lines does violence to the natural demands which express themselves in the differentiated interests of the pupils.

In speaking of interests it should be recognized that by no means all of these, either in childhood or in maturity, are called forth by economic needs. There has been a tendency in recent educational discussions to assume that boys and girls always find school lessons formal and stupid unless they see clearly how these lessons may be made to bear upon the earning of money. This tendency toward economic determinism in educational theory is most unfortunate. A premature or excessive appeal to occupational and economic motives may easily result in a narrowing of the horizon and a closing of the mind to the broader things of life. Under the older social order the wider vision was essentially a class privilege; it is the task of the schools of a democracy to make this privilege universal. And this demands an abundance of opportunities and stimulations which the older curriculum is too narrow and too inelastic to provide.

The general principles which have been set forth in the foregoing paragraphs are capable in practical organization of many different kinds of application. The authors of this article find it possible to agree even on certain judgments with regard to the practical organizations which can now be observed in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. It is a well-known fact that there is at the present time no uniformity in the organization of the so-called junior high school. There is the junior high school which is nothing but a departmentalized union of the seventh and eighth grades.

Its course of study is identical with the course of study which has been in operation for years past. There is, on the other hand, the junior high school which sharply differentiates and divides its students into entirely different social castes. Some of the latter types of schools have laid great stress on commercial or industrial training and have treated the junior high school as the device for introducing into public schools a narrow type of vocational training at an early stage in the life of the pupils. Neither of these extreme types seems to the authors of this article to conform to the principles set forth in earlier paragraphs.

Criticism of the unhappy forms of junior high school organization which have appeared in recent years should be paralleled by criticism of the unmodified seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. The elementary school has long suffered from the poverty of its course of study. There was a time when the sessions of this school extended through only a few months in the year. Then there was some justification for a course of study limited to the rudimentary branches. As the school year has expanded the traditions of purely rudimentary instruction have in some quarters survived. Teachers have been loath to branch out into new and productive lines. They have sometimes been so faithful to the limiting traditions of the earlier school that they have spun out with the most conscientious industry subjects that did not require the time lavishly bestowed on them.

The foregoing statement of an educational creed cannot be closed appropriately in this day of urgent social problems without a word with regard to the opportunity which is here for the making of American schools more truly democratic than they have ever been before. Our school system, with its present meaningless distinction between the elementary and secondary fields, grew out of European traditions. The elementary school especially carries many of the limitations that were imposed on the school designed by an aristocratic society for its common people. The high school has been and still is the school of privilege. Step by step we have been shaking off the restrictions which tradition has imposed on the common school. This article is a plea for a united effort to complete the task of democratizing American elementary education. There

certainly can be no curtailment in such a program. There ought to be nothing but expansion and the elimination of breaks. Our school system should be in every sense a "unit" system. It should reflect at every point the two fundamental and complementary principles of democracy—opportunity and obligation, opportunity for individual development, coupled with and paralleled by the obligation of the individual willingly to learn the lessons that all must learn in common if our democracy is to rest on a real community of ideas and ideals.